



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *110th* CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2008

House of Representatives

EFFECTS OF TROOP DEPLOYMENTS

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. At this time, I would like to recognize the gentleman who suggested that the 30-Something Working Group take up this subject during our weekly hour. He is a tremendous leader when it comes to the issues important to veterans and military families, Chairman BOB FILNER, the gentleman from California.

Mr. FILNER. I thank the gentlewoman for her leadership on many issues, especially in these special orders, and tonight a very important one, the effect of deployment on our families, our military families.

You know, this is a war that has gone on the second longest in our history. There are over 4,000 young men and women who have been killed. There have been at least 30,000 casualties that we account for of Americans, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. That 30,000 official figure, by the way, compare that with the following statistic: Over 800,000 veterans have already returned from this war in Iraq.

Over 300,000 of them have filed claims for injuries, whether physical or psychological, while in battle, 300,000. Compare that with the official figure of 30,000. It is a factor of ten. Something is not being told to the American people here.

But then, think of all the families involved of those who have been killed, the best and brightest of our young men and women, the casualties that we admit, the hundreds of thousands of casualties when they come home. Not only do they have to deal with fatality or grave injury, they have to deal with income problems. A spouse may have to take care of her husband and lose two incomes.

What about the children? Over 1 million children of those deployed or were deployed or will be deployed, how do they take daddy coming home, or not coming home, dealing with violence that is a symptom of PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder, dealing with an amputated father or mother, dealing with brain injuries?

This is something that we as a society have got to deal with. It is part of the cost of war, and the cost of war that we have been asked to take on doesn't cover this. We have to fight for every penny for veterans and their families.

The President says support our troops, support our troops, support our troops. But when they come home, who supports the troops, and who is looking after the families? And that is what we are dealing with tonight.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. *Filner*, your leadership on the Veterans' Affairs Committee has just been second to none. Your commitment to our military families has been so incredibly important in trying to make sure that we can highlight their needs and the struggles and difficulties that they go through; and the policy that you are shaping in your committee to make sure that we can improve their lives.

Mr. FILNER. Let me focus, if I may, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, on the children. And children have to deal again with dad or mom away for extended periods. You mentioned the Lopez family. Or the problems may really begin when dad or mom come comes back, amputated legs, spinal cord injuries, posttraumatic stress disorder.

Now, this is something that our VA or DOD or administration ought to be worried about, and yet it was left to the private sector to figure out, what do we tell our children? How do we answer something at an age-appropriate level?

And I want to thank the Sesame Street Workshop who produces Sesame Street, the nonprofit educational organization, for its leadership. As you mentioned, there are hundreds and thousands of children of military families who are impacted every day by the deployment of one or both of their parents. They responded to this 2 years ago by making an outreach tool to help families and their young children cope with the challenges of deployment: A DVD featuring Elmo who struggles with military deployment of his father, and urges his viewers to share their emotions and fears directly with their parents. After watching this video together, families have found a new opportunity to talk with their children and communicate together as a family.

Here is the first DVD that Sesame Street did under a Talk, Listen, and Connect series, Helping Families During Military Deployment; and also in Spanish, Partidos Militares Bienvenidos Cambios. And that was distributed with the help of the military and the help of the VA to hundreds of thousands of young people.

Just yesterday, Sesame Street launched a new DVD, a new series called Deployments, Homecoming, and Changes. And that addresses the level of anxiety children may experience after multiple deployments, as well as to help young children gain an age-appropriate understanding of a parent's combat-related health condition so the family can heal together. The DVD features again Elmo and Rosita, and intersperses the Muppets with real families like the Lopez family that you showed us earlier. They are meant for children, but spouses and friends and relatives facing a complicated transition of multiple deployments or the physical and psychological wounds.

I invite, by the way, all Members of the House of Representatives to meet Elmo and the Cookie Monster next Wednesday on May 7, at 4:00, at HC-5. Sesame Street will bring Elmo and the Cookie Monster. You can take pictures with him or her, I am not sure, and pick up a copy of this DVD. It will be distributed free to military families all over the Nation.

I hope every one of our colleagues picks up a copy, watches it, and helps distribute it in their own districts. This is an important tool that was produced for us by people who care about what is going on.

And I will tell you, we are now in the Month of the Military Child. We want to honor the children of military families. But we have now a tool to reach children. This is aimed at very young children below the age of five. And if they watch what is going on, again, I have seen some of the previews. One of the children of a parent with a prosthetic leg was shown bringing the leg to dad to try to make that situation sort of natural and a part of life and not something to be ashamed of or to fear. And so

Sesame Street uses the power of video to connect with soldiers and their families and of course the children.

You can watch the video yourself. Go to sesameworkshop.org/tlc for Talk, Listen, and Connect; Hablen, Escuchen, Conecten, at sesameworkshop.org/tlc, and you can see that and watch it for yourself.

I would just like to say to my colleague from San Antonio, who is a psychologist and has dealt with children in his professional life and is a great aid on our veterans committee for issues of mental health and the issues we are talking about today, we thank you for your leadership, Mr. Rodriguez.